



News Release

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Last Remaining Native Mussel in New Mexico to be listed as endangered

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will list the Texas hornshell, a freshwater mussel native to the southwest, as endangered under Endangered Species Act. Once abundant throughout rivers and streams in southern New Mexico and the Rio Grande basin in Texas, the hornshell has experienced population declines and currently occupies only 15% of its historical range.

Like many other freshwater mussels across the Southwest, the hornshell is threatened by habitat fragmentation and loss as a result of impoundments and reduced water quality and quantity. The final listing determination is based on the best available science including the Species Status Assessment, review and input from the state agencies and academia, additional surveys in Mexico and public comments.

“The Endangered Species Act is a tool used to help species recover to healthy populations. Going forward, the Service will work with state and local stakeholders to enhance conservation of the hornshell while also respecting local voices,” said Amy Lueders, the Service’s Southwest Regional Director.

To provide conservation benefits for the hornshell and regulatory certainty for landowners and industry, the Service has worked closely with the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish (NMDGF), the Center for Excellence (CEHMM), the New Mexico State Land Office, the oil and gas industry and landowners to develop a Candidate Conservation Agreement and a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances for the Texas hornshell on the Black River.

In October 2017, the Service also finalized a Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) and a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) for the Texas hornshell, as well as the Rio Grande river cooter, gray redbreast (a fish), blue sucker and Pecos springsnail. Interested landowners or industry can enroll in the CCA or CCAA until March 12, 2018, the effective date of the listing. The CCA and CCAA will be in effect for 30 years and cover conservation activities that take place on federal and non-federal lands in the Black and Delaware Rivers in Eddy County, N.M. and Culberson County, Texas.

The Service is also actively working with partners in Texas and New Mexico on efforts to conserve the hornshell. In New Mexico, in addition to working with the state, Bureau of Land Management

and industry along the Black River on the CCA and CCAA, and the NMDGF to reintroduce the Texas hornshell into the Delaware River, an area within the historical range of the species.

In Texas, The Nature Conservancy and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department are managing their lands in the Devils River watershed to reduce sediment inputs and contaminants, thereby benefitting the Texas hornshell and other aquatic species. Research focused on helping improve the understanding of the species is being funded by the Office of the Texas Comptroller.

The Texas hornshell can grow to more than 4½ inches long and live up to 20 years. Like other freshwater mussels, it uses fish to complete its life cycle. Fertilized hornshell eggs develop into larvae and are released from the adults into the water where they attach to fish. The fish encysts the larvae on their gills, face or fins where the larvae transform into the juvenile form and are released. If they are released in a suitable area, they can attach to a substrate and complete their development, becoming reproductive adult mussels.

In the Rio Grande, the Texas hornshell has been found downstream of Big Bend National Park and near Laredo in Webb County, Texas, in the Pecos River near Pandale, Texas, and the Devil's River in Val Verde County, Texas. In New Mexico, populations persisted in the Pecos River drainage, including the Black River. The Texas hornshell was thought to be historically, widely distributed in Gulf Coast rivers in Mexico. However, results from recent surveys in Mexico indicate that these populations are not Texas hornshell but another undescribed species.

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